

**Welcome in the Hamburg City Hall
4th of September 2009**



**Welcome speech by Uwe Ram, Head of the International Department,
Office of the Senate of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg**

Dear Colleagues from Ashdod,

It is a great honour for me to welcome you today on behalf of the Senate of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg here in our town hall.

I am especially glad that you have come from Israel to Hamburg even though the German history makes it very difficult for some of your fellow countryman whose families suffered during the Nazi regime in Germany to visit this country.

In my department we organize every year two group visits of former Jewish Citizens of Hamburg – many of whom come to Germany for the first time after more than 60 years – to give them the possibility to see their former hometown and to be assured that history and guilt have not been forgotten in Germany.

Later on you will have a guided tour through this house but let me assure you that this is not a museum but a functioning place for political decision making and administration. Hamburg as you may know is a city-state which means that as one of the 16 states in the Federal Republic of Germany we have – at least to a certain extent – the possibility to govern the state by our own standards and law, especially in the fields of culture, education and police-matters.

This town hall is a unique one in Germany not only it took nearly 50 years after the old town hall was destroyed in the great fire of Hamburg in 1842 to decide where and how the new town hall should be built, but it is also the only town hall in Germany where the city government and the parliament share the same roof.

To understand this building – which might look a little bit overdone with all the gold and semi-precious stones – these pillars for example are of massive Onyx – one has to remember that Germany in the late 19th century was a monarchy and Hamburg had a tradition of nearly 800 years of self governance. The Senate – our government – wanted to demonstrate that a city governed by the citizens themselves was as well able to show wealth as any aristocrat or even the emperor himself.

At the same time the building was very modern at its time. It was the first official building in Hamburg with electric light and the fireplaces are all just

for decoration because central heating was there right from the inauguration of the house in 1897.

I have been informed that you already had three days of visit and seminar and I hope that you were able to not only

I hope that you will enjoy your tour through the house while I will have the opportunity to speak with Ms. Rosenthal who will rejoin your group later.

Thank you very much for your attention.